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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

VOL. 9

MARCH MCMXXXI

NUMBER 6

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Percy Allen

MR. Wilfred Walter has been known to all of us, for many years past, as an actor well graced in presence, and gifted with one of the best speaking voices upon our stage to-day; but it may have pleasantly surprised others, besides myself, to discover, in this Shakespearean player, a dramatist who could adroitly fashion fifteen connected duologues into a full evening's entertainment, "Happy and Glorious," in the form of a satiric wardrama, with himself for leading man, producer, and designer of the settings. Seldom, indeed, can a whole production, including author, cast, and scenery, be driven away in a taxi or two, at the close of the run. The play's vivid diction and colour of phrase owe something, perhaps, to Shakespeare's example. Mr. Walter's opposite, Miss Miriam Adams, performed her scenes with pleasing competence.

It has often been observed that a man's destiny may hang upon a decision whether, walking, one morning, down Bond Street, he chance to turn left or right, thereby determining the current of his days. Such is the theme of "If," Lord Dunsany's fantasy, revived at the Arts Theatre, with Mr. Robert Atkins as producer—an interesting and original play, with some vividly written scenes, that afford to Mr. Ralph Truman opportunities which he puts to good use; but the piece, technically considered, has one serious flaw, namely this, that the man who, with the aid of a magic crystal, catches, at last, the train he had missed ten years before, is not now quite the identical individual that he was. Exigencies of plot demanded a stronger

character; and a stronger character, Lord Dunsany, upon the horns of a dilemma, decides to supply, thereby sacrificing, in psychological consistency, at least part of his gains in dynamic effect. Miss Jane Amstel vamped alluringly in a role "created" by Miss Gladys Cooper.

The word "Haymarket" is a synonym for English comedy at its best; and Mr. Watson's latest presentation, "Supply and Demand," is considered, by some, to be below sample. Probably it is, despite the glamorous presence of Miss Mary Newcomb, bravely denying herself the pleasure of playing "big" and so tearing a gauze-textured comedy. There are plenty of amusing lines; and these, it may be, have hindered, as well as helped, since character and probability were occasionally sacrificed thereto. Is it, for example, wise policy, without genuine pretext, to bring a whole company upon the stage, for a midnight pyjama-curtain, merely to fulfil the leading lady's forecast, that her antagonist—cleverly played by Miss Marjory Clarke—wears, instead of a dressing gown, a mackintosh in her chamber. "Supply and Demand," nevertheless, has entertainment value.

Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge's "Three Flats," done by the Three Hundred Club, with its stage set portraying three "foyers" simultaneously, proved, in my judgment, far more interesting as an object lesson in modern stage method and production, than when considered merely as a play. Thus technically viewed, the piece was quite fascinating; but the drab misery of what Henry Arthur Jones used to dub "The Pentonville Omnibus

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

Drama," with its exaggerated impression of the monotony of life's daily round, and its silence concerning the nobility of service, and the potential pleasures of work, struck me as basically untrue. The unnaturalness of some of the dialogue, and of the reactions of certain characters thereto, further diminished my pleasure in this tragedy of adult discontent; so that, by contrast, I was the more pleased in the evening, to witness a comedy of juvenile revolt, with hereditary throwback, "After All," by John Van Druten, who adds to his

faculty for dialogue, and characterization, a developed power to charm.

The most popular play in London, however, seems to be that deft satire upon American manners and methods, "The Improper Duchess," by Mr. J. B. Fagan. This dramatist never probes far beneath the surface of life; but his mocking gravity is so graceful, his wit so unfailingly alert, and his trained stagecraft so cunning, that a comedy by him always moves with ease, especially in this instance, when Mdlle. Yvonne Arnaud is upon the stage.

AN AUSTRALIAN LITTLE THEATRE

By Richard Pennington

THE history of the Australian stage is not a splendid one. It has generally been the pale and belated reflection of English theatrical development—pale for lack of enterprise and artists, belated because Australia is, artistically, several light years distant from the European constellation. But in recent years, though musical comedy still predominated, there had been a gradual improvement, corresponding to the revival of the drama in England, until the Talkies came and conquered, and drew away much of the theatre-going public.

It was not an undeserved fate for theatres that had been content year after year to produce merely picturesque and musical pageants and to be no more than three-dimensional talkies. They went down before a rival that could beat them easily both at the music and the gorgeous spectacle. And if to-day the Australian stage is nearly dead, it is because the theatres have never given the public the opportunity to appreciate good plays, and so have failed to create a sound theatrical taste. That they have never satisfied a considerable section of the public is shown by the many small semi-professional theatres that have from time to time been established, inspired by the 'Repertory' movement in England and by the success of the 'Little Theatres' in America.

This Australian Repertory movement began in Melbourne in 1910 and it has continued—flourished is not quite the right word—in various places, intermittently, ever since, with the help of much voluntary labour and much zealous idealism, but never with any great

financial success. It is probable that each venture has meant a loss to its founders or shareholders, and the cause has always been the same—insufficient capital at the beginning: and, since the war, the heavy entertainment tax which lies too heavy on the small theatre.

Apart from the Melbourne Repertory Theatre, which is still, I believe, in active existence, the most promising and most ambitious of all these Repertory Theatres was the Turret at Sydney. It had a brief, adventurous and not inglorious life, and it proved that while there is a certain demand for the best of ancient and modern plays, that demand is not yet sufficiently developed in Australia and further that the 'Little Theatre', unless well endowed, is a hopelessly uneconomic way of meeting and fostering that demand.

The Turret Theatre had its origin in a Dramatic Club organised for the purpose of producing the best contemporary and ancient plays. The Club was chiefly the creation of a few people who have always been the generous supporters of the arts in Sydney: Mr. R. Windeyer, K.C., the Misses Tildesley, and Mr. Don Finley, for whose brilliant theatrical abilities the new theatre was to provide a means of expression. The necessary capital was obtained by forming a company and issuing shares, the inducement being that shareholders in the Theatre received, instead of an annual cash dividend, concession rates for seats and one free seat a year for each share held. They were also, as shareholders, members of the Club and excused the annual membership fee.

AN AUSTRALIAN LITTLE THEATRE

Members of the Club who were not shareholders received as one of the benefits of membership certain concessions in the price of seats. It was not a simple system and it involved a complicated system of booking and the printing of special tickets; but it helped to form the nucleus of a regular supporting audience. It also raised the £1000 with which to lease and modify the old Council Chambers at Milson's Point and to buy the lighting equipment, the seats, the stage furnishings and sets. It seems incredible that all this was done with £1000.—or £600., as at first and for a long time it was. But much of the work was given free, the turretted building above the harbour resounding day and night with the activities of a few fanatics who laboured to bring the glories of European drama to the unenlightened nation.

It is strange how enthusiasm can transfigure anything, even finance. It was believed that a theatre seating only about 150 would be able to produce eight or ten new plays each year and show a profit. Actually, it produced ten plays and showed a loss. Yet when it is remembered that it started with about £600 and an old building that had to be thoroughly adapted, and put on ten plays of the most varied kind, the Turret Theatre made a brave show.

It began in the right spirit. Everything was to be appropriately done: the acting and production were to be harmonised with the intimate character of a Little Theatre and given an individual 'Turret' stamp; the interior was to be untheatrical and unaggressively modern, and carried out in shades of cream and brown; the chairs were separate wicker ones; the stage settings were to avoid all attempts at literal representation. Even the typography of programmes, prospectus, advertisements and leaflets was to be in the best manner, the best of the 'old-face' types on the best paper. It was good publicity policy, but it assumed distressing proportions in the accounts. These ideals were laudable, and they were, for a time, achieved, though at a cost slightly in excess of the theatre's takings. The standard of plays was high without being highbrow; the production and acting were of a professional excellence; seats were cheap. Yet the public showed great apathy towards an enterprise that was not floridly advertised, grandiosely housed and extravagantly run. Perhaps it missed the at-

tendants in scarlet and blue, the excess of electric light all over the building, the mirrored entrance hall and Moorish interior: all the trappings that popular snobbery apparently demands.

During the year of its existence the Turret's programme was well maintained and a definite standard was established. The first play, appropriate to the social function of inaugurating a theatre, was a comedy, Noel Coward's "Hay Fever." It was a great success, and it brought to light a brilliant young actress in Naomi Waters, who took the part of Sorel Bliss. In this and in subsequent performances no footlights were used, the whole lighting system consisting of overhead battens, side lights, and two powerful lights in the auditorium. For a permanent background a cyclorama was constructed at the rear of the stage.

The second play was Benavente's "Passion Flower," a suitable contrast to the artificial comedy that had preceded it. It had an extraordinary popularity, partly by reason of the excellence of the acting, especially that of Adèle Quinn and Phyllis McGrath, and partly because of the dramatic quality of the play. It was frequently revived. The "Passion Flower" is exactly the type of play that would never be produced were it not for the small semi-professional theatre; it would be too "literary" for the general theatre-manager, a term which is used to indicate a profound and subtle presentation of human action and emotions.

There followed in turn Goldoni's "Mine Hostess," Clemence Dane's "Granite," Sierra's "Romantic Young Lady," Davis's "The Barber and the Cow," Betty Davies's "The Touch of Silk," Howard's "The Silver Cord" and Naomi Royde-Smith's "The Balcony". The brilliant Goldoni comedy was richly staged and dressed, and cleverly presented in a highly conventionalised manner; and yet with all its polish and sophistication, its mockery and wit, it failed to appeal; perhaps these very qualities were the cause.

Of the other plays that were performed the most interesting was Betty M. Davis's "The Touch of Silk," an Australian play by an Australian writer, and as indigenous as the landscapes of Heyson and the tales of Lawson. It tells of the struggles of a small farmer who has returned from the war to make a living out of the grudging Australian soil, and of the sudden temptation that comes to his French

AN AUSTRALIAN LITTLE THEATRE

wife to spend their last resources on a few of the once familiar luxuries of life. As he toils incessantly against the hostile forces of nature and man, this last betrayal seems to him the worst blow of all. But the real antagonist is the drought, and the play burns with its terrible oppressive heat, until the end comes with the first heavy drops of the belated rain.

The curtain of the Turret fell for the last time upon the final performance of "The Balcony," the least successful of the Turret's productions, but relieved from dullness by the fine acting of Naomi Waters as the heroine. Had the theatre been more popularly supported, the following season would have seen produced a more modern programme, for it was hoped that it might be possible to put on

such plays as Capek's "Macropulos Secret," Lenormand's "Devourer of Dreams," Antoine le Jeune's "l'Ennemie" and possibly the "Nebeneinander" of Kaiser. The theatre was also ambitious of producing—for the first time on any English stage—a translation of a remarkable and magnificent Danish play: "The Revolution Wedding".

But with ten plays to its credit, nearly all of them new to Sydney, the Turret Theatre found itself at the end of the year facing a loss, and in view of the business depression that was foreshadowed it decided to shut its doors.

It is strange to close a theatre. Where once were bright colours and changing lights and the sound of passionate declamation, the dust falls in silence; and the box office stares like blind Polyphemus through the closed gates.

DRAMA AND THE VILLAGE HALL

By Maurice Farquharson

SEVERAL hundreds of villages up and down the country are at this moment building or contemplating the building of a Village Hall. Hundreds more have built and fitted out a Hall since the war. This development in the social life of the village has a bearing on the drama movement, the importance of which it is difficult now to calculate, but which shows promise of being considerable and may conceivably prove revolutionary.

The League has always stressed the community aspect of the dramatic art, and it is because the village is a self-contained community of manageable size that it may become the cradle of a vigorous modern drama tradition. The social life of a village is not dispersed, as in a town, but concentrated on a centre. Many and varied are the uses to which this centre may be put. Lecture hall, concert-hall, theatre, cinema, library, Men's club, Women's Institute, Welfare centre, Badminton club, young people's organisation, even public baths, the village may need them all, and each must, in a small village, come under the roof of the Village Hall, if it is not to be dispensed with altogether. A test for community organisation, to ensure that all interests live at peace with each other. But the fact that the theatre

is not a theatre only, but the centre of varied interests colours the dramatic activity. Perhaps in the towns these separate interests are too watertight. The community players centering on the Village Hall are not a body apart, consisting of experts, or people who think they are experts. *C'est déjà quelquechose.*

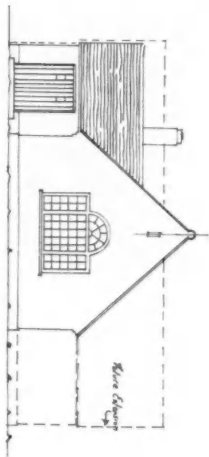
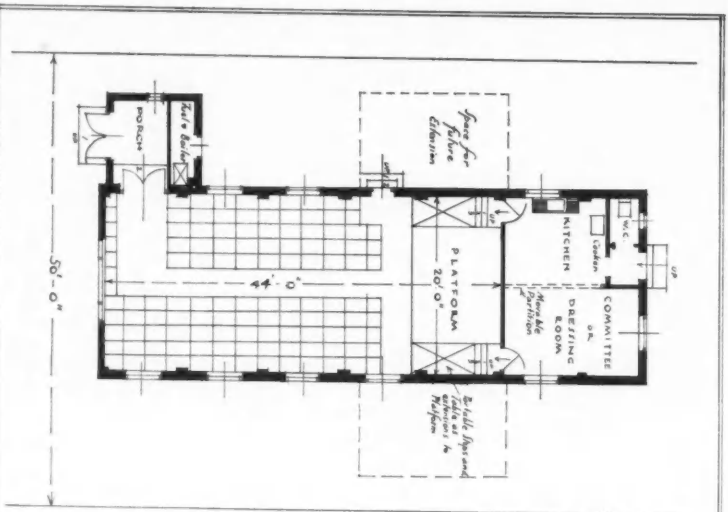
Villages are nowadays going about the business of planning and organising their halls in a manner more calculated to bring about a vital, fluid, and varied life in their communities. The newer Halls are held on trusts that allow of free development. Petty restrictions that have done much to narrow the scope of usefulness of Village Halls in the past are no longer thought necessary. Management, generally speaking, is now left to those who are going to use the Halls, and in many villages the various organised interests appoint their representatives to serve each year on the Village Hall Council or Committee.

These Halls are not brought into existence in a day. Far from it. The necessary fund often takes years to raise, and village Committees, like all others, are subject to disagreement. But their work is important to the national life, and is recognised as such by the Government and by the Carnegie Trustees, who, as is

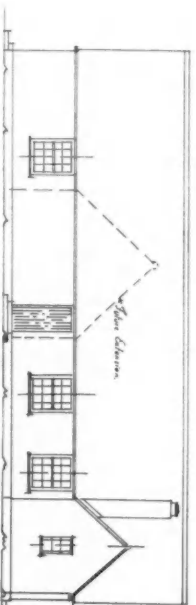


SCENE FROM ACT II. "THE PASSION FLOWER" BY BENAVENTE, AS PRODUCED BY THE TURRET THEATRE, SYDNEY.





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TYPE "B" WITH SIDE ENTRANCE TO ALLOW FOR PORTABLE PROJECTOR AT THE BACK OF HALL, AND FOR EXTENSION OF HALL AT EITHER SIDE - HEATING BY FLOW OR LOW PRESSURE BOILER, AND RADIATORS - MATERIALS FOR WALLS AND ROOF COVERING IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL TRADITION AND SUPPLY -

DESIGN FOR A SMALL VILLAGE HALL.
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DRAMA AND THE VILLAGE HALL

now well known, are ready to help those villages who are ready to help themselves, in the provision of a Hall.

The actual buildings vary greatly in quality, according to the circumstances of the village. Help on a generous scale is often given by individual residents and a fine characteristic brick or stone building rises in the village. Very poor villages, however, work for years by getting up Fetes, Whist-drives, Sales of Work, and so on, and still can point to no tangible result of their efforts, and it is not surprising then that impatience gets the upper hand and prescribes a cheap, hut-like building as a more easily attainable goal. In such circumstances, the wiser build with an eye to the future, contenting themselves with an instalment only of what is needed, and on a plan that will permit of future extensions on a dignified scale.

Every Village Hall should have a stage, and the great majority of them do. So far, however, very few of them have stages which do not greatly hamper serious work. It is possible, of course, to do serious work on any stage or no stage, and some would have us believe that an artistic virtue attaches to work carried out without proper facilities. Most people will agree, however, that better work is normally done on the practical than on the un-practical stage. And the majority of Village Hall stages are highly unpractical. No vast technical knowledge of the theatre is needed to provide against this. The main consideration is that players, furniture, stage-manager, should not all be enclosed in a three-walled box from which a door in the back wall provides the only means of egress. In the absence of the enclosing walls, on the other hand, they should not be subjected to the danger of falling blindly off the edge of the stage into an abyss as they pass out of sight of the audience. In a Village Hall the stage should usually extend the full width of the Hall from side to side. A device by which one village at least has reconciled this principle with the necessity of allowing for tea-traffic between the main Hall and the kitchen behind the stage, at times when the Hall is not serving as a theatre, but as a social meeting place, is to bridge over, at will, the passage way existing between each end of the stage and the side wall, by means of hinged flaps that will let up against the wall when not needed.

Serious work is certainly being done in the villages to-day and what may be summed up as the new attitude of non-professional players to the drama, the spirit that animates the National Community Drama Festival, is alive in the villages. The fact that a number of village societies are now starting *ab initio* is possibly an advantage in this respect. A village drama festival recently held in one of the midland counties provided an illustration of this attitude. The festival was itself held in a village, the performances being given in the new Hall, a beautiful stone building with an attractively simple auditorium and an excellent large stage. The performances were followed by criticism of the keenest order by a first-class Adjudicator. Trenchant home-truths were delivered, to be ruminated over at leisure, and these were taken in good part, not only by the audience, whose withers were, of course, unwrung, but also by the players themselves, most of whom were extremely inexperienced. Praise was also given, sparingly, and especially to one woman player, to whose team the trophy was awarded. This lady had appeared in a comedy part and was compared in it by the Adjudicator to Mr. George Robey, warm praise indeed. When she came to receive the Shield and the enthusiastic audience required a speech, she confined herself to the remark that her group could have done nothing without their Producer. It may be added that this Producer, who had not herself appeared, proved to be a lady, who with little or no previous experience of production had attended a Summer School for Producers and had since turned what she had learnt there to good account.

In some counties the competition element in any form is deprecated and instead of a trophy, certificates of standard are awarded by the judge. The outstanding feature common to all, however, is that able criticism is felt to be necessary and is warmly welcomed by these village players. Non-professionals are comparatively free from the merciless criticism of the box-office, and a competent adjudicator can supply this important factor in a more intelligent and constructive form. In the majority of cases, moreover, this adjudication is the culminating point in a scheme of study for village producers that may include short schools, courses of lectures, or occasional help at rehearsal in the village hall itself.

DRAMA AND THE VILLAGE HALL

What may be called "county feeling" is strong in many country districts and village players seem to be looking more and more to these county Festivals as the test of their work, and the arena for friendly rivalry with other villages. It is good to learn, however, that a scheme has been prepared which may bring these village Festivals inside the

National Festival so that they may be identified with the national movement. Among the outstanding needs of village players to-day are easier access to one-act plays of good quality, more opportunities for village producers to learn their job better stages, and a Village Hall for those who have not yet got one.

WRITING A ONE-ACT PLAY

III. CONSTRUCTION

By Edward Lewis

AFTER reading a good many one-act plays by amateurs, I get the impression that not many of them spend much time or thought upon the construction. They get hold of an incident or an episode, and put it down in the form of dialogue in the first way that occurs to them.

A play tells a story, whether long or short; and, as Aristotle pointed out long ago, there are three moments in every story, the Beginning, the Middle, and the Ending. The three Acts into which a full-size play is so often divided frequently correspond more or less to these three moments. But however many act-divisions there may be in a play, and wherever they may be placed, these three moments must be recognised—Preparation, Development, Dénouement. In the first, you introduce your characters, tell the audience as much as may be necessary for them to know about "previous history," and set the situation out of which your crisis is to arise; in the second, you have your main action proceeding with an increase of emotional tension and perhaps through minor crises up to the major crisis; and in the third, you bring your play to its conclusion in one or other of the many ways in which that none too easy feat may be performed.

Now, in a short play, these three moments must be observed, although it is obvious that the exigencies of time will require that the first and the third must be very brief. The curve of the emotional tension of a one-act play should begin to rise soon after the play has begun, should proceed steadily and with increasing interest up to the crest of the crisis, and, once the crisis is passed, should fall

steeply to the final curtain. This is a good scheme to bear in mind, although no writer with any dramatic flair will allow a mere scheme to lord it over him.

It is therefore clear that the really difficult parts to write in a one-act play are the beginning and the ending. The middle part will usually carry itself along pretty well, if you have a good story, under its own steam; but in the opening and the closing of your play you will have to use every trick in your technical bag. They must be brief and clear. These are the two great essentials. Brevity does not mean merely that you must say much in little. You must of course say everything that is necessary, and add as much as you can to give living reality and solidity to your characters. Every word must be carefully chosen, and must be made to tell with its full value. Every stage direction must be carefully thought out with a view to communicating to the audience something which it is necessary they should know. Characters must immediately identify themselves. At the end of the first five minutes, the audience should be in no doubt as to what the characters are and what their relationships are. If possible, the entrance of a character and the first words he utters should definitely stamp him.

It will often be necessary for you to give certain facts about the characters and the situation to the audience in order that it may clearly understand the crisis which you propose should gather before its eyes. These must be given with the pregnant brevity of which I have spoken; and it will be all to the good if you can give them in such a way

WRITING A ONE-ACT PLAY

as at the same time to reveal the character of speaker and to hint at, or "foreshadow," the action which is to come. Nor must you think that the facts may be stated in any order. A good rule—though all have their exceptions—is to state the broader and larger facts first, and the lesser details afterwards.

In the middle portion of the play, keep the emotional curve of the action as steady and as constantly upward as you can. Delay heightens the tension; and in a long play there is plenty of time for the employment of this device. In a one-act play you have little time for delay. Use it if you can do so with advantage; but beware of giving your play a "broken back" which is fatal. If, for instance, you defer giving some "previous history" until a later moment in the play, and have to stop the action while you give it—as if you said, "Oh, I forgot to say"—you will run serious risk of a 'broken back.' Or if, after having got your play moving, you make a brief excursion down some side-issue, or mark time while your characters back-chat or tell stories, you will run the same risk. Having once gained the interest of your audience, you cannot afford to let it slip for a second. There is no time to recapture it. In the emotional sequence of the middle portion of your play, it is important to remember that, where several incidents are used in the building up of your crisis, the incident with the smaller emotional value should as a rule be given before that with the larger. Do not start with a moment so exciting that the rest of the play will seem flat in comparison with it.

Since the arrangement of facts and of emotional values is so important in the construction of a play, it is a good plan to write out a scenario or skeleton before tackling the play in dialogue. There are dangers in the use of a scenario in the case of a long play; for instance, a living character may develop along unexpected lines, and in a way the scenario left no room for. But in a short play, you can scarcely have your characters playing tricks of this kind; you must have a clear line from the start; and a scenario will help you to see and study the plan and pattern of the play like the pattern of a tree before the foliage grows on it.

When the crisis of your play has been reached, the end must come at the earliest possible moment after it. A play which ends

before it stops is doomed. When the crest of the wave of excitement has broken, get your curtain down as swiftly as you decently can. Your ending may be quiet, or it may be theatrical; if you have a surprise up your sleeve to end the play with, take care that it is psychologically justified; but in any case end quickly; let your audience depart with the full flavour of the crisis in its mouth.

Briefly, a one-act play should be lean and taut, and (if possible) with a mule's kick in it.

THE EASTER SCHOOL

Opportunities for acting will be a special feature of the Fifth Easter School for Amateur Producers, to be held at King's College, Kensington, from April 13th to 25th. Throughout the morning and afternoon, Miss Edith Craig will conduct individual auditions, in order that everyone who desires to act may be fully tested. The formal opening of the School will take place after dinner, when it is hoped that Mr. R. C. Sherriff will give the inaugural address, by way of introduction to Mr. Edward Lewis's four lectures on Play-writing. At previous Easter Schools we have had evening sessions, but these have never been very well attended. This year, therefore, we are offering a special course at 5.30 p.m., Entitled "What Every Player Ought To Know". This series of eight lectures (Tues. 14th to Friday 24th) is intended primarily for beginners and those who coach them—Scout-masters, Guiders, Settlement-workers etc. Tickets for single lectures are procurable at the door; price 1s. 6d.

An addition to the Programme of the School has been arranged in the form of a Soirée, at which the Students and others will be invited to meet some of the players and adjudicators in the National Festival of Community Drama. This event will take place at King's College, at 8.30 p.m. on April 20th, which is also the date of the Final National Festival Matinee. Tickets (price 1s., covering tea and coffee) are obtainable, in advance only, from the Community Drama Secretary, British Drama League, 8 Adelphi Terrace, Strand, London W.C.2. Full particulars of the Easter School, and of two other Schools (St. Ives, April 8 to 22) and Norwich (July 29 to August 12) are now ready, and may be obtained free on application to the same address.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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Telephone: TEMPLE BAR 8507-8.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Club Room at Adelphi Terrace has been the scene of some very interesting discussions during the winter months. Mr. J. T. Crein started the series in November with an amusing paper "Some Bones to Pick". Mr. Ernest Milton followed with a profound address on "The Presentation of Illusion in Theatre". Then came Dame May Whitty on "The Stage as a profession" and Mr. R. C. Sheriff on "Some Impressions of the Talkies". The last Talk of the series will be given on Tuesday afternoon, March 24th, by Miss Rose Macaulay. Her subject will be "What Makes a Play Good?" Members of the League may join the Club Room, and thus be present at these discussions, at a subscription of 10/6 per annum. The subscription for Non-members of the League is £1. 1s. od. We would remind our readers that the Club Room is open daily from 11 a.m. till 8 p.m., (Sundays excepted) and light meals are obtainable throughout the day.

The first few days of March will see the Area Festival Performances in the National Festival of Community Drama. The Eastern Area Festival will take place at the King George's Hall, Great Russell Street, on Wednesday March 4th, at 6.30 p.m. On March 6th and 7th there will be Festival performances at Bristol, Liverpool, Bournemouth, and Glasgow. The last-named centre runs a Festival on both evenings, at the Atheneum Theatre, when Mr. Lennox Robinson will be the Judge. Mr. Norman Marshall will adjudicate at Liverpool, Mr. Edward Lewis at Bristol, and three other centres in Western Area, and Mr. Miles Mallison in London. The next number of Drama will contain the complete list of Societies entering the Festival, and the National Festival Final will take place on Monday afternoon, April 20th.

There has been a good response to the announcement made in last month's DRAMA concerning the Postal Course on the Elements of Play-writing. Many students have already enrolled, and there is no doubt that this new activity on the part of the League will meet a real want. It has come to our notice that some prospective students have been under the impression that they can enter the course only at certain specified dates—at the beginning of the term, as it were. This idea is erroneous, and enrolments can be registered at any time, so that the student can begin work immediately. A detailed prospectus of the course can be had on application to the Secretary of the League.

We congratulate the Trecynon Amateur Dramatic Society on being the latest recruit to the small but ever-increasing number of Community Groups who possess their own Theatres. The new Little Theatre at Aberdare was officially opened on Feb. 19th, as described on another page. It should certainly assist the work of this old-established but enterprising Society, and should do much to further the progress of the Community movement in South Wales generally.

RECENT BOOKS

By Norman Marshall

"Stage Scenery and Lighting." By Samuel Selden and Hunton D. Sellman. Harrap, 12s. 6d.

"Amateur Stage Management and Production." By Charles S. Parsons. Pitman, 7s. 6d.

"A Book of Dramatic Costume." By Edith Dabrey and C. M. Wise. Harrap, 10s. 6d.

"A Book of Marionette Plays." By Anne Stoddard and Tony Sarg. Allen and Unwin, 5s.

"Seven Shrovetide Plays." Translated by E. U. Oules. Deane, 6s.

"Their Hour upon the Stage." By James Agate. Mandrake Press, 6s.

THE fault of most of the "practical" books written for the amateur is that, although they are thoroughly sound in their instructions about how to do this and that, the things they tell the reader to do are usually old-fashioned and conventional. "Stage scenery and Lighting" is an exception. Here is a book which explains every practical process down to the last screw, but which at the same time is inspired by thoroughly modern and progressive theories of stagecraft. I would recommend this book even to those whose interest in the theatre is quite theoretical and "unpractical," as its illustrations alone make it worth possessing. The authors can congratulate themselves on having more than fulfilled their own aims, which were "to satisfy a need for a short, but comprehensive handbook of scenery and lighting for college, school, and community theatres. It is addressed primarily to those who are designing, building, painting, and lighting scenery; but in it something will be found for the director and actor, as well as for the student of the theatre."

"Amateur Stage Management and Production" belongs to the more old-fashioned class of books for the amateur. The chapters on stage management are excellent, and there are some equally useful chapters on how to construct lighting equipment, but the section of the book which deals with production is so full of dusty old fallacies that it is best left unread. There is a chapter with the grandiloquent title of "The Psychological Effect of Colours in relation to Stage Management and Production" which deals with the whole of this complicated subject with astonishing ease. For instance, we are informed that "for the proper digestion of a grand opera or a serious problem play a different general atmosphere is required, namely, a more stately and solid one. This will call for a little blue lighting, with or without some red, according to the probability or otherwise of the plot provided for the audience." Lighting a play must be delightfully simple for Mr. Parsons.

"A Book of Dramatic Costume" claims to be "the first comprehensive and thoroughly practical guide to stage costume design to be made available in a size and at a price which meets the need of amateur dramatic societies". This is one of those "practical" books to which I have already referred. It ought to prove useful to the beginner who wants a bird's-eye view of the subject, but the illustrations are on so small a scale that many of them are of little value, especially as they are none too well reproduced. In addition there are several drawings of stage settings, none of which is good enough to deserve its reproduction in a book. I personally found this book depressing reading, as both text and illustrations have a rather drearily painstaking air, and the whole effect is too reminiscent of a

classroom text-book. It does undeniably present a difficult and complicated subject in a very clear and simple manner, but it is not the sort of book likely to inspire the reader with any particular enthusiasm for the subject.

I am one of those people who are frankly bored by marionettes. Those who enthuse over the antics of puppets usually hint gently that my own lack of enthusiasm is due to the fact that I am not sufficiently sophisticated to appreciate thoroughly unsophisticated pleasures. I am afraid this does not worry me as much as it ought, but it certainly does make me quite unfitted to review "A Book of Marionette Plays." The part I liked best is the description of how to make a Toy Theatre for children who are too young or have not the skill to make or manipulate typical stringed marionettes. This little theatre is complete with stage, scenery, puppets, stage-properties and lighting arrangements. The dolls are operated from below and move about the stage in grooves made for the purpose.

The "Seven Shrovetide Plays" which Miss Oules has translated and adapted from the German of Hans Sachs is exactly the sort of book which is most badly needed by the huge number of small and comparatively unsophisticated amateur societies. Hans Sachs was a cobbler of Nuremberg in the fifteenth century, who wrote nearly a hundred brief satires, farces and moralities, playing for about a quarter of an hour, and intended for performance on the public holiday before Lent. They are still performed in the country round Nuremberg, and make ideal plays for village companies. Their most attractive characteristic is the intimate and friendly relations they strike up with the audience. There is no need for the players to strive after any attempt at "illusion": they can play directly and simply to their audience, with the minimum of scenery and costume, and with the most primitive sort of stage. As Miss Oules points out in her introduction, Sachs was as matter-of-fact a poet as ever there was, and his work has little emotion or imagination. But on the other hand these plays are unfailingly theatrical in the very best sense of the word, they are full of first-rate dramatic situations, they often achieve an unexpected impressiveness through sheer simplicity and sincerity, and they are packed with good humour and high spirits. Miss Oules has translated them vigorously and "theatrically," usually substituting prose for verse, freely cutting and transposing, adding stage directions, and here and there writing in additional passages of dialogue. This is a book which will be relished and used by every village dramatic society which has sufficient sense of the dramatic to realise that the photographic reproduction of life in the cottage living room is not the sole end of village drama.

I put Mr. Agate's book of selected criticisms on the table by the side of my bed, looking forward to enjoying it in a leisurely manner, an article or two each night. But when I finally closed the book at three o'clock in the morning, I had read it right through from beginning to end. I have deliberately reviewed it last, because I knew that if I began with it there would be little room left on the page to mention any other books. And now I have no more room left to do more than to urge everybody who does not already possess this book to get it at once and read and re-read it.

WHY DO WE DO IT?

By An Amateur Producer

EVERY night between October and April sees a harassed producer in one of our village halls desperately propitiating a truculent member of his company, who has threatened to emulate his professional prototype and 'walk out of the show.' This done, the producer turns to the mechanical side of his performance, calls hoarsely for more light, checks his 'Props' and anxiously regards the ropes which work the curtain. For, as like as not, he is property master, stage manager and producer rolled into one. Aye, and plays a part as well.

Yet he struggles on, sparing an occasional evening for a trip to his nearest town to cast envious eyes upon a touring production of some West End success. Coming into the cold night air, he reviews the items of the lavish stage equipment he has just seen, compares it with his own, and sighs. Then recalls the accounts of the inauguration of now famous repertory theatres, and takes heart again. Of the true bull dog breed is your amateur producer.

It is typical of this fellow that his only boast is that no other society in the land is as poorly equipped as his own, and that no other producer has a tithe of his difficulties to overcome. Therefore my reader cannot blame me for getting my blow in first on behalf of "Rantham" Amateur Dramatic Society.

"Rantham" is a Midland village of some eight thousand working class inhabitants. Our theatre is the local cinema which deals out bi-weekly doses of film dope to our potential audiences, and incidentally charges us a prohibitive price for the hire of the hall. As our village does not exactly abound in Garbos, we cannot compete with Hollywood in anything but comedy as far as the taste of the villagers is concerned. While on the subject of our hall, it must be mentioned that the advent of talking pictures has raised the hire charge a hundred per cent.

Having booked our cinema, we proceed to push tickets, a process which needs no explanation. Over us during these critical weeks hangs the dread that we shall not clear the necessary percentage of profit for our pet charity in order to free us from the clutches of the Revenue authorities.

Then, with some misgivings, I begin to make tentative inquiries as to the possibility of a dress rehearsal. Until this year we have

never had one! As our hall is a cinema, we can only use it on Sundays or after the evening performance. A previous attempt at an evening rehearsal was abandoned when we found the furniture piled in a heap in the middle of the stage. The sorting out process would have lasted until midnight.

Presumably, our dressing accommodation is neither better nor worse than that with which other amateurs have to contend; two rooms with water supply, and equipped only with the usual 'shelf' and a few hooks. Just before the show, we discovered a leak in the roof of the cinema, which resulted in a steady drip on to the centre of the stage. Fervently, we prayed for a fine evening.

Our wish was fulfilled. Instead of rain, we had a suspicion of fog—just enough to keep the doubtful ones away—very cold and clammy. Arriving an hour before the start, I found that the heating apparatus was just lukewarm, thus assuring us of an audience which would be physically if not mentally cold all evening.

At all our performances we are favoured by a crowd of satellites, all anxious to be in the way. They stand around and offer suggestions during hectic intervals, gossip with each other and with people who are really busy, and finally they pull to pieces a show which they see for nothing. Also, they do their utmost to be 'accidentally' discovered in full view of the audience.

Then comes two hours of apprehension. Lines are missed and miraculously recovered. Stage positions are forgotten. Actors say their lines in the old, old way, instead of that in which I have spent hours drilling them. Yet nobody seems to notice. And even when the curtain hesitates in its descent, the audience is in no wise dismayed.

In addition to the above very real embarrassments, the producer spends quite a number of sleepless nights anticipating other dire predicaments. For the brain which so readily devises 'business' is apt to lead the producer into many woeful labyrinths, and, despite the optimistic assurances from some of his company, it is not until he is mopping his brow after the final curtain that he can bring himself to believe that it will be 'all right on the night.'

A NOTE FROM STOCKHOLM

By Bror Danielsson

THE international character of the plays performed in Stockholm has long been a predominating factor in the progress of Swedish civilisation, and plays no minor part in the era of a new Sweden marching towards "its place in the sun". A national culture never goes on quite by itself, there must always be international sparks to fire it up. And this international character has been strongly emphasized by Mr. Erik Wettergren, the eminent actor and connoisseur of fine arts who is now director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre, carried on by subsidies from the State.

If we look at the programme of this theatre during the last two years we find that French plays have dominated. Not less than nine have been staged, including "Topaze," by various Authors from Moliere through Dumas and Sardou up to Verneuil. Eight Swedish authors have been played, of which Strindberg is the only one performed on an English Stage. Of American plays, "Strange Interlude" had its first European production here; and "What Price Glory," known to the English public only as a film, has already been given. England is represented by such names as Shakespeare, Shaw, Harwood and Bennett; Germany by Schiller, Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser; Norway by Ibsen; Greece by Aristophanes and Aeschylus; and even countries like Austria, Denmark and Japan are represented. And in general the other theatres of Stockholm are following this example. Especially the last six months of 1930 have been an enormously interesting time for the play-going public in Stockholm, and have no doubt given strong impulses to the Swedish stage. In the early summer the Japanese Kabuki theatre reminded us of a people where a stage spirit of bygone days is still wondrously alive and active; the Russian Habima showed us how the dramatic instinct that ever lived in the Jewish people can be cultivated to perfection. Brann's famous "Munchener Kunster Marionetten Theater" gave us mimetic conventionalising of the Orient, with its Turkish dolls' play "Wasif and Akif." Then we have seen Schiller's "Fiesco" intensified to a political dynamo. Not Fiesco the individual but Genua the

community was the tragic person. The producer was clearly the artist and the actors only interested as *figurants* in the political play.

But we have also enjoyed the great acting artists of our stage: Chaliapine as Boris Godanov—though as a vocal artist he is still greater—perhaps the greatest living actor in Europe. Gosta Ekman, the great Swedish actor, has also presented himself to us in light English Comedies. The American "Black Flowers" have shown us the Negro naively. And Hjalmer Bergmann's impressionistic comedy, "Marcurells in Wadköping," has had its first night—a great event in the history of Swedish drama. "Wadköping" is the typical small town of Sweden with its little tragedies and comedies, but also a symbol of the great world outside where God is for ever playing with mankind. But Hjalmer Bergmann's style with its wonderful alterations between fine irony, crusty humour, bitter tragedy and robust grotesque, puts enormous claims on the capacity of the producer, who did not always manage it happily.

But the most remarkable productions in recent times were undoubtedly those shown at the festival plays in the open-air theatre of the Stockholm Exhibition of Arts, Crafts and Ideal Homes, where actors and producers from the Royal Dramatic Theatre played a most important role.

A SUGGESTION FOR NEXT YEAR'S FESTIVAL

Mr. Ernest Goodwin, whose "Devil among the Skins" was presented by the Liverpool Players when they won the National Drama League competition in 1929, wants to get into touch with an amateur dramatic society who would undertake to present in next year's competition another short play of his. It is a "period" play with four characters—a Gallant, a dashing Highwayman, a Caretaker, (little comedy man) and a spirited girl.

It may be well to mention that there is some business with foils for the Gallant, the Highwayman and the Girl.

Mr. Goodwin's address is 25 Hampstead Hill Gardens, N.W.3.

THOUGHTS ON THE NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF COMMUNITY DRAMA

By Robert Newton

ONCE again the preliminary rounds of the National Festival of Community Drama are over: we have seen the same hopes, the same disappointments, the same disputes and all the various elements that go towards giving the movement life. Some teams get embittered with failure, some too exhilarated with success: everywhere there is a certain amount of fever. At such a time, when individuals and societies are worked up to concert pitch, the fundamental purpose of the festival cannot be too strongly stressed.

It seems at the moment that our theatre is moving definitely in the direction of National expression. The National Theatre, for instance, has become more than the dream of the Idealist. Yet for all the splendid and practical work that is being done towards its establishment, it is not yet a concrete fact, but very much in embryo, fighting its way through to existence—a cause demanding the help of all sincere lovers of the drama.

If the National Theatre is still in embryo, the National Festival of Community Drama is, however, very much a fact—positively in existence and gathering strength from year to year. Yet at present the movement has only made contact with a fraction of amateur activity in this country; there is a wealth of dramatic enterprise in no way connected with the Festival. I am well aware that there are many reasons which make such a situation unavoidable at present, but until the knowledge of, and the opportunity to take part in the Festival is offered to the whole field of amateur dramatic activity, the movement has no proper right to the title "National"; and National it must become to be an essential part of the life of the country. Institutions and organisations interested in Community Drama must sink their differences in the common cause. We want a Community Theatre—essentially native—which will, by its co-operative strength be a stimulus to the Art of the Theatre in the British Isles. Movements of this sort demand organisation, a body which will be the expression of their ideal. A central Headquarters, provided it really is the expression of the ideals of its members, gives sanity and strength to a cause, but for Thespis' sake, don't let us

have half-a-dozen headquarters! Community Drama wants one head: I hope it may find that head in the British Drama League.

If this movement is to be the big thing it promises to be, it is up to individual societies to realise their responsibilities. A National Community Drama will not be brought about by sitting back and watching how one's neighbour is getting on, or by pretending one is too busy to take part in it oneself. "All very nice for villages—gives them something to do". What nonsense! How can any society be too "grand" for a movement that is, after all, only the expression of the common ideal. Pride, we know, is one of the most difficult things to swallow, and it is often difficult for the bigger and more ambitious societies to swallow theirs, but they must make the effort. Too many societies have kept out of the Festival because they have not been able to get the right lighting or scenery: I sympathise—nothing is more infuriating to the ambitious producer; but surely all who are associated with the big, successful societies can see that by pulling their weight, by giving their strength and experience, they are raising the whole standard of the Festival and helping to bring about a time when they will be able to perform under more ideal conditions. By keeping out they are merely putting the whole movement back, and being just a little selfish. Then there are teams who refuse to enter for fear of being beaten and thereby losing local prestige: if this is the spirit that is being substituted for commercialism, I prefer the latter: at least it is honest. There are also dramatic centres which, refusing to enter a team for the National one, organise their own local Festivals or rather Competitions, thereby attracting the "pot-hunter," and encouraging the competitive spirit at its very worst.

I know that the present National Festival is competitive, but it is only so in the second place: primarily it must always be a Festival. The competitive element is a very natural sop to our human nature that likes its excitement and demands its reward—perhaps because as children our parents gave us sweets for being good. But a Festival should be



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SCENE FROM "THE GILDED WREATH,"
BY CONSTANCE SMEDLEY. GREENLEAF
THEATRE PRODUCTION AT THE EVERY-
MAN THEATRE, JANUARY, 1931.

THOUGHTS ON THE FESTIVAL

more like a medieval tournament in spirit: societies should take part for the sake of the thing itself. There is no true Festival, unless actor, audience AND adjudicator (ugly word) have something of this spirit. As an adjudicator, one frequently gets examples of the right sort of feeling that are most encouraging. The other day I had a letter from a team that came out badly bottom, which finished up as follows:—

“...by joining the Festival we are helping to hasten the time when drama and a National

Festival will mean something of importance to the lives of the community. May I say we have the “Invictus” spirit!”

On another occasion a team travelled 65 miles to act and returned the same 65 miles after the Festival was over. Again, a village team, having won the local cup in one of the divisional rounds, was received by the Fire Brigade in full regalia on their triumphant return. How heroic! I can hear the negative cynic already. But the Festival Spirit just simply is heroic, and that's that.

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE DRAMA LEAGUE LIBRARY

Plays

Barry, P., *In a garden*, III, 4 m., 2 w. Bayliss, A. E. M., ed., *Junior one-act plays of to-day*. Besier, R., *Barretts of Wimpole Street*, IV, 12 m., 5 w., Binyon, L., *Three Short Plays*. Bone, F., *Cousin Sarah's Quilt*, 2 m., 6 w. Bowen, M., *Family Comedy*, 2 m., 6 w. Bridges, R., *Works Vol. V*, (*The Christian Captives*, V., 5 m., 2 w., sprs. *Humours of the Court*, III., 5 m., 7 w., sprs.) Browne, R. G. and Harwood, H. M., *Cynara*, Pro. III, Ep. 16 m., 14 w. Davis, O., *Donovan Affair*, III, 11 m., 6 w. Gow, R., *The Sausage*, 2 m., 1 w. Hackett, W., *The Barton Mystery*, IV, 5 m., 5 w. Hampden, J., ed., *Four Modern Plays*, Hayes, E., *Enchantment*, 1 m., 2 w., 1 b. Hobbie, J. L., *Daddies*, IV, 6 m., 8 w., ch. Housman, L., *Palace Plays*. Howard de Walden, Lord., *Five Pantomimes*. Jennings, G., *These pretty things*, III, 4 m., 7 w. Johnson, P., *Respectable facade*, 1 m., 4 w.; *Sister who walked in silence*, 2 m., 2 w. Kaufman, G. S. and Ferber, E., *Minick*, III, 6 m., 9 (or 7) w. Kirchon, V. and Ouspensky, A., *Red rust*, III, 23 m., 8 w., sprs. Matthews, A. and Nichols, A., *Just married*, III, 9 m., 5 w., sprs. Matthews, B., *The Chief European Dramatists, from 500 B.C.—1879 A.D.* Maugham, W. S., *The Breadwinner*, III, 4 m., 4 w. Metcalfe, M. G., *Where there's a will, there's a way*, 2 m., 3 w. Moses, M. J., ed., *British Plays from the Restoration to 1820*, 2 vols. Nicholl, T., *Sung before the bridal*, Pro., 8 scenes., 4 m., 2 w., sprs. *Passion Play at Oberammergau*, 1930. Phelps, P., *Adolescent Young*, 13 w.; *Plays of to-day*, Vol. III. Poppelwell, O. M., *Tyranny and tea-cakes*, 5 w. Radcliffe, C., *Borgia*, 1 m., 2 w. Ridley, A. and Merrivale, B., *The Wrecker*, III, 11 m., 4 w. Sachs, Hans, Tr. and adapted E. U. Oules., *Seven Shrovetide Plays*. Shakespeare, W., *The Swan Shakespeare*, ed., C. B. Purdom, 3 vols. Shaw, G. B., *The Apple Cart*, II, interlude, 10 m., 5 w. Simpson, H., *Rose of Araby*, III, 6 m., 13 w., chor., sprs. Six Plays (*Green Pastures*, *Street scene*, *Badger's Green*, *Down our street*, *Socrates*, *Alison's house*). Smith, F.

Sladen, *Wonderful Zoo*, Pro., 11 scenes, ep., 11 m., 4 w. Smith, W. and Ongley, B., *Brewster's Millions*, IV, 14 m., 6 w., 2 b. Stevens, H. C. G., *To meet the King etc.* Swears, H., *Dumb Jewels*, 2 m., 4 w.; *Interlude*, 1 m., 1 w. Sylvaine, V., etc., *Road of Poplars, etc.*

Titheradge, D., *Crooked Billet*, III, 9 m., 2 w. Tobit, *Story of Tobit*, adapted from the Apocrypha by D. Pailthorpe, Z. Procter, and D. Rock, Mime., 8 scenes 10 m., 7 w., sprs.

Vachell, H. A., and Simpson, H., *Plus Fours*, III, 4 m., 5 w. Vallance, R., *Pilgrims*, 2 m., 1 w.

Williams, E., *A Murder has been Arranged*, III, 4 m., 5 w.

Books on the Theatre.

ESSAYS.

Whitworth, G., *The Theatre of my Heart*. (R)

THE THEATRE ORGANISATION

Stanton, S. E., *Theatre management*,

SCENIC ART

Harris, G. W. [Designs]. Forewords by St. John Ervine, Basil Deane, and Lascelles Abercrombie. *Monumenta scenica*, Vols. XI and XII.

CONSTRUCTION AND PLANNING

Shand, P. M., *The Architecture of Pleasure*. Wilson, R. A., *The Small Stage and its equipment*.

ACTING

Behnke, L. E., *Speech and movement on the stage*.

VOICE

Fogerty, E., *Speech-craft*.

DRAMATIC HISTORY AND CRITICISM—AMERICA

Clark, B. H., *An hour of American drama*.

INDIA

Keith, A. B., *Sanskrit drama*.

BIOGRAPHY

Benson, Sir F., *My memories*. Courtneidge, R., *I was an actor once*. Harvey, Sir J. M., *The Book of Martin Harvey*. Irving, Sir H., *Henry Irving*, by E. Gordon Craig.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

O.U.D.S.

The Oxford University Dramatic Society presented "Hassan" at the New Theatre, Oxford on Tuesday, February 17th, for a run of five nights. The undertaking was an ambitious one, with Mr. Basil Dean as Director in the background. Mr. Giles Playfair's "Hassan" was a good and very promising performance, and the other outstanding one among the men was Mr. Devine's "Caliph".

As at previous O.U.D.S. productions, the chief women's parts were taken by professionals. Miss Peggy Ashcroft was a beautiful and beautifully spoken "Pervaneh," and Miss Thea Holme, a sufficiently seductive "Yasmin".

The O.U.D.S. belongs to that group of amateur societies who attempt a definitely professional standard of accomplishment. The wisdom of such a course will always be debated, not only because comparisons are inevitable, but also because some of the virtues peculiar to more amateur methods are necessarily foregone. The present production certainly did not err on the side of "amateurishness". The effort to be "professional" was perhaps a little too much in evidence. But the play is, of course, one of extreme difficulty if attempted from this point of view. A more insistent attention to the speaking of the verse—on the part of the male characters—would have compensated for the omission of some Beauty Chorus effects that hardly added to the dignity of the whole.

G. W.

ST. MARY'S D.S. NOTTINGHAM THE RED UMBRELLA

This whimsical play calls for the utmost from any amateur company; it is the most difficult to get over and, if this is not achieved, its first scene's dialogue sounds very weak. Later scenes were better. The company has learnt the value of silences, and the scenery was efficient.

Edith Hamilton as Principal was well cast but kept her voice rather too level throughout. Stewart Blomfield as Lorris played excellently with good diction in just the right pitch for hearing, but he cannot achieve the face of a man of forty merely by slightly greying the temples. The same defect in a lesser degree spoils the work of the 80 years old Mr. Carter (John Theobald) as his movements were too rapid and youthful for a man of that age; his cheeks wanted hollowing. When Wilmot Stapleton as Cyril Carter had warmed up he gave a sincere and fresh performance, speaking clearly. Sidney Robinson got many laughs as a rather burlesque parson, and was well backed by Hilda Sykes as his wife. Nora Elston as the servant Martha did some good work but had an odd trick of bending from the waist instead of from the neck and shoulders. John Westmorland and Phillis Cooper were the country lovers.

For a fairly new company this team promises well, being well supplied with competent men—always an asset to amateurs; the general level of work was good. Producer—Ruth Derry.

N. P. T.

"COCK ROBIN"

By producing for the first time in London "Cock Robin" by Elmer Rice and Philip Barry, the G.P.O. Players have broken the tradition, which persists among Civil Service dramatic societies, of repeating many years later the facile success of the professional world. The authors bring their well-known originality to the construction of a thriller. And we may whet curiosity by saying that it concerns a murder, very adroitly carried out, during the opening moments of a play by amateur actors. We watch the play which the amateurs perform as if we were at the back of the stage and glimpses of the auditorium across their footlights, which, of course, face us. Quarrelling over little at rehearsal the group are soon quarrelling over something real—a murder committed with such dexterity that the wave of suspicion passes over almost everyone on the stage before it engulfs the actual assassin.

The caste get a fair distribution of work in this play and the G.P.O. co-operated well. Particularly good were Mr. Wilfred Sellars as a hard, sophisticated producer; Mr. Eric Hudson as a little, nervous, over-anxious Stage Manager; Mr. Gerald Storr who has a vigorous manner and a rich voice; Mr. Horace Pilkington, who has a well-deserved reputation in the Civil Service for skilful acting. Miss Dorothy Smith as the Stage Manager's assistant with an infallible "camera eye" played throughout the evening with unusual finish. The performance was an enjoyable and commendable experiment. JOSEPH LOCKS

CHARITY PERFORMANCE

MISS IVY SMITHSON'S PUPILS AT STOCKTON

A dramatic entertainment given by the pupils of Miss Ivy Smithson in the Constitution Hall, Stockton, recently, on behalf of the local hospital, afforded the public further opportunity of judging for themselves the fine character of the work which Miss Smithson is carrying on in the district.

The large audience were denied the privilege of hearing Miss Smithson herself, but she received an ovation at the end of the long programme.

What one liked most about the whole production was the exquisite use of the English language even by the tiniest of the pupils. In scenes from Shakespeare's "Henry V.," presented in costume of the period, high praise must be given to Joan Glover, F. Richmond, and E. Metcalfe for their acting.

Another beautiful presentation was "Darby and Joan" by R. R. Fyelman, and not only were M. Taylor and J. Wilkinson picturesque in their colouring, but they quarrelled as to the manner born.

The concluding item was an amusing sketch, "The Final Rehearsal," by Cadwel, well staged and acted by E. Morland, Q. Wells, J. Dodsworth, E. Metcalfe, and F. Richmond.

During the interval the Rev. A. J. Bott, on behalf of the Hospital Committee, expressed thanks to Miss Ivy Smithson and her pupils for so generously giving their services for charity, and in a regretful allusion to Tee-ide's almost complete conversion to the talking pictures to the exclusion of the legitimate theatre, he appealed for full support for dramatic art as so admirably presented that night by amateurs.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

NOTTINGHAM PLAYGOERS

The honour of being the first body to hear of the Drama League's proposal for a National Theatre Guild belongs to the Nottingham Playgoers Club, which had invited Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth to talk about the case for State Support of the Drama on February 9th. Mr. Holford Knight, K.C., M.P. (for Nottingham) and a member of the B.D.L. Council was prevented by an urgent Parliamentary Whip from presiding and wrote to Mr. Nevil Truman (Secretary of the Club) as follows:—

"I had hoped to share in welcoming to Nottingham my old colleague Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, whose fine work for the drama is widely appreciated. I also desire to commend the scheme which he is to expound for assisting the National Theatre.

"Nottingham has a keen sense of the theatre and it will respond (I feel sure) to Mr. Whitworth's appeal.

"The National Theatre is no far-off, divine event, but a fact which we can accelerate by our enthusiasm. The National Theatre is part of the new heritage we must build up in England and cannot be buried by old-fashioned politicians who will be buried and forgotten when the National Theatre rises to the glory of the land. We seek the patronage of no Government but the general recognition of a grave national lack and the energy for its redress.

"Politics is something more than an interminable wrangle about wages and tariffs. I hope the Nottingham folk of all classes who believe this will help the Playgoers appeal."

Instancing the fact that our Art Galleries were paid for by the State and that the Theatre in many foreign countries received state support, Mr. Whitworth declared that the best drama throughout the ages had been patronised by the State, but not always by commercial enterprise. In witness of which he referred to the Roman and Greek states, France under Louis XIV., and the many German Princes Courts later.

Our present system, he said, meant that good new plays once their initial run was closed, were seldom, if ever, revived. The main object of a national theatre should be the presentation of good classic plays, old and new, but not on the lines of experimental drama.

The provinces might declare that they would receive no benefit from a theatre in London; as might be said of the National Gallery or Stonehenge—yet both radiated their influence throughout the country, and it would be found that the national theatre in London would have an inspiring and marked effect in raising theatrical standards throughout the land.

Enrolment in the new guild became general, over a hundred subscriptions being received within a few minutes and others being received later.

Mr. Sladen-Smith's "The Saints Comedy" was presented by members of the club afterwards.

N. P. T.

THE SHEFFIELD PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY

The Sheffield Playgoers' Society gave a successful production of Farquhar's "The Beaux' Stratagem" at the end of January. The dialogue was spoken for the most part with the right manner—artificial yet lively, consciously graceful, yet with point and spirit. Perhaps Mrs. Sullen (Miss Edna Mackie) was a thought

too young and eager for the elegant and disillusioned lady, but her voice was beautiful, and she was as pleasing to the eye as to the ear. The gentlemen with the get-rich-quick plan were played competently by Mr. C. A. Williams and Mr. Sydney Ash. It was among the bucolics, however, that the richest acting was found. Mr. E. F. Watling as Scrub gave an unforgettable performance. Miss Florrie Bennett missed no point in her neat, quickwitted Cherry. Mr. Harold Pointer gave a notable little study of the drunken booby Sullen, and Mr. G. A. Vann was a genial rogue as Boniface.

The Crafts Section showed their skill in a series of bright-hued, well designed costumes, and a gorgeous painted bed. It was altogether a delightful evening, and showed that a "classical" play can be as gay, pointed, daring and amusing as Mr. Lonsdale or Mr. Coward.

NEW LITTLE THEATRE AT ABERDARE

The new Little Theatre of the Trecynon A.D.S. was officially opened on Thursday afternoon, February 18th. Speakers at the opening ceremony included, under the Chairmanship of Mr. W. M. Llewellyn, Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Prof. Hughes, Mr. Sam Jones, and the Rev. E. R. Dennis, for many years Producer to the Society.

The Theatre, which seats over 350 people, has been built on the site of a disused engine shed, presented to the Society by Sir David Llewellyn. It is a delightful building, comfortable and practical, and should inaugurate a new era of prosperity for the Trecynon Players. The Trecynon Society was founded in 1909, and although it cannot claim to be of the very earliest companies, its foundation, at least, was of that period when the future of the Art in Wales was a vague and dubious thing.

The Trecynon Society set out on its eventful career at the Park View, Trecynon, and here it was that they rehearsed their first play—"Eluned Gwyn Owen" (Rev. J. Tywi Jones). The Society's next work was "Beddau'r Proffwydi," by Professor W. J. Gruffydd. From that time on numerous well-known plays have been staged and also original productions depicting life in Wales. The latter include "The Crisis" (E. R. Dennis); "Ymhlith Troseddwyd" (E. R. Dennis); "Little Village" (J. O. Francis); "Y Forwyn Newydd" (E. R. Dennis); "The Bridge" (D. R. Davies); "Ashes of the Past" (D. R. Davies); "Fuchsia and Hydrangea" (M. Mead); "Y Joan Danvers" (Stayton, translated D. R. Davies); "Canhwylbrenni'r Esgob" (Norman McKinnel, translated J. D. Powell); "Breuddwyd" (E. R. Dennis); and "A Woman of Compassion" (Florence Howell).

Much has been achieved, and numerous successes include over fifty first prizes in Drama Competitions; Champions Midland Area British Drama Competition, 1927; Second in Drama League Festival for Great Britain (out of 300 Societies), New Theatre, London, 1928; National Eisteddfod Winners, 1928; Champions British Drama League (Welsh Section), 1930; National Eisteddfod Winners, 1930; and winners outright (after three victories) of Howell R. Jones' Cup at Dowlais. The Society have raised over £5000 for charity. Trecynon players were the first Welsh amateur actors to broadcast from the B.B.C. Station at Cardiff.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE OXFORD AND BERMONDSEY SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY

Those who subscribe to the idea that Shakespeare is old-fashioned would do well to visit Bermondsey when the Oxford and Bermondsey Shakespeare Society are performing. There they would find a large hall packed to the doors, and some of the opening scenes of the play almost marred by the noisy protests of the crowd outside who were unable to gain admittance.

Here we have a society with almost every obstacle to overcome—lack of scenery, poor lighting, the extreme youth and inexperience of the actors, to mention only a few—and yet the sincerity with which they set to work carried them through triumphantly, so that in looking back one loses sight of the many imperfections and remembers only the greatness of the endeavor.

The play was presented in curtains, with a crude attempt at scenery reminiscent of performances given in Shakespeare's own time at the near-by Globe Theatre in Southwark. This was a commendable idea as it helped largely to minimise some of the unavoidable crudities which would have been thrown more sharply into relief by a more elaborate production. The very excellent acting of Mr. Tom Teather as Othello was the outstanding feature; his diction, gesture, and stage presence were all surprisingly good. Miss Bella Itzcovitz as Desdemona, and Mr. Ernie Thorpe as Iago also gave good performances. The producer, whose name did not appear on the programme, is to be congratulated on the grouping, which was often very effective, and on his handling of the very difficult last scene. But, above all, it was Othello's evening.

Eric Holmes.

THE WIGMORE PLAYERS

The production of John Drinkwater's "Mary Stuart" by the Wigmore players at the Century Theatre, London, was unfortunately marred by one or two accidents in stage management which destroyed the atmosphere of some of its best scenes. It is good to find an amateur company with the courage to attempt so big an undertaking, but there were elementary faults in production which deprived it of the honours the sincerity of the actors should have earned. The costumes were very good indeed, but the actors were obviously unused to them, and experienced difficulties which the crowded state of the stage did nothing to lessen. It should always be borne in mind that a costume play is deserving of an extra allowance of dress rehearsals. As Mary Stuart, Miss Baines worked hard and gave a very good performance, but she failed in portraying the essential royalty of the character. Mr. Edward J. Saxon, in addition to producing the play, doubled the parts of Andrew Boyd and Lord Darnley. His anxiety to give two entirely different readings lead him to over-play the part of Darnley from the first, so that we missed the gradually increasing madness of the man. In this way the character lost much of the sympathy it should inspire.

Others of the cast gave to these players whole-hearted support, and a special word of commendation is due to Mr. R. Temple Savage, who not only played the part of John Hunter in the prologue, but composed two of the melodies sung during the action of the play.

Eric Holmes.

MYSTERY PLAYS IN CATHEDRALS.

Glastonbury in her parish church celebrated, last Christmas, with joy and beauty the nativity of Christ—four times. The play, with music written and adapted by Dr. Howard Mackinney and the scenes produced by Miss Dorothy Carritt, was given before crowded congregations. And D. Lee Williams might have heard his question echoed a hundred times: "Why cannot this play be given in the Cathedral?"

G. I. Whitham.

HULL PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY.

For variety of dramatic fare and wealth of producers the Hull Playgoers' Society hold an enviable position today in the amateur world. Already (as recorded in recent issues of "Drama") they have, during this present season, successfully staged in their own "Playgoers' Theatre" such diversified productions as Capek's "R.U.R." (producer, Mrs. James Downs), Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale" (producer, Mr. E. Haworth Earle), and—only a week or so ago—Shaw's "Man and Superman" (producer, Miss Jennie Young); and at the moment the Society has in preparation two further ventures, the first (in April next) being a presentation for the first time on the English stage, of a costume-comedy by Goldini entitled "Daughters are Dutiful" (producer, Mrs. James Downs) and the second (in May) a "Twelfth Night" production for local colleges and schools (producer Miss Constance Clark). Five productions, four producers, and to a great extent different casts—no mean record of activity for one Society!—and, incidentally, no light task for the Society's stage-manager, Ida Munroe Clark, and scenic director, Sydney Thompson, both of whom share the credit with the various producers for the valuable work done throughout the season. Sydney Thompson, by the way, is also part-author of the translation of Goldoni's comedy above-named.

APRON STRINGS.

THE BOLINGBROKE PLAYERS, at St. Mark's Hall,
Battersea Rise.

It is my usual habit to make notes on my programme, but I find the programme of "Apron Strings" is covered with sketches of members of the audience, who interested me more than the players on the stage. This was more the fault of the play than of the Bolingbroke Players. It is an unreal play, full of clichés, and quite unreasonably irritating, and I felt sorry that Miss Ruby Glover, and Mr. Leslie Taylor, both of whom gave excellent performances, should have been provided with such very poor material.

The play was presented under great difficulties of staging and lighting, but it was obviously under-rehearsed, and gave far too much scope to the prompter. The production seemed a little stilted but Miss Lois Barker, as producer, must have found many insurmountable difficulties to contend with. The chief fault lies with the committee who selected the play—there are so many much better plays on the same subject. This one, unfortunately, seemed to be full of talk and yet had nothing to say. I hope that next time I see the Bolingbroke Players they will have made a more worthy choice.

Eric Holmes.

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